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ALASKA MAN SENTENCED TO 30 YEARS IN PRISON ON SEX TRAFFICKING AND DRUG CHARGES

WASHINGTON – An Alaska man was sentenced today to 30 years in prison for sex trafficking of minors and adults, as well as drug trafficking offenses, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Nelson P. Cohen of the District of Alaska announced.

Don Arthur Webster Jr., 51, also known as “Jerry Starr,” was sentenced by Senior U.S. District Court Judge H. Russel Holland. In addition to his prison sentence, Webster was ordered to serve a lifetime of supervised release following his release from prison.

Webster was convicted on Feb. 5, 2008, of 28 counts in the first sex trafficking trial in the District of Alaska. After 11 days of testimony, the jury found Webster guilty on two counts of sex trafficking of a minor; nine counts of sex trafficking of adults by force, fraud or coercion; two counts of distributing crack cocaine to a pregnant woman; four counts of distributing crack cocaine to individuals under the age of 21; and eight counts of distributing crack cocaine. Webster was also convicted of one count of maintaining a premises for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing crack cocaine, and one count of manufacturing crack cocaine.

“This defendant preyed on the most vulnerable among us to make a fast buck. Using fear, violence and intimidation, he forced women and children into the tragic world of prostitution and drugs,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich. “The prison sentence handed down today denies Webster the freedom he denied his victims, and those who commit similar crimes should expect to be prosecuted.”

“Evil takes many forms. Don Webster, a/k/a Jerry Starr, embodies several of them,” said U.S. Attorney Nelson P. Cohen. “He is a drug pusher-who used both cocaine and crack to enslave his victims. He is a disgusting bully who manipulated women and children. He is a physical abuser who forced his will upon weaker people with threats of burning them with boiling water; confining them to a closet; beating and raping them; and even choking a woman to the point of unconsciousness in the presence of two other women and a child. He is a thief who stole their dignity and hope. He is a violent predator who deserves the sentence imposed today. There are people in our world who need to be locked up and put away for a long time. Jerry Starr is one of them.”

The case against Webster revealed that he operated sham escort businesses that were

fronts for prostitution in the Anchorage area of Alaska. The evidence presented at trial established that Webster would target children and women who were homeless, in low-paying jobs or runaways, and invite them to work for his purported “escort services” – Foxy Roxies, Sunshine Girls, American Beauties, Kotton Kandy, Tiffani’s, Tickle Your Fancy and Lickety Split – businesses where an individual would supposedly pay for another person’s “time and company.”

Evidence at trial further proved that in exchange for money from clients who called the escort services’ phone lines, Webster would provide adult women and underage girls to engage in sex acts. According to testimony, the prostitution business operated on an “out call” basis, meaning that the females would meet the caller at his residence or at a hotel paid for by the caller. The caller would agree in advance to pay a fixed hourly rate plus a transportation fee in order to meet with a woman, and then would pay additional money in exchange for sex acts or drugs which Webster provided.

The youngest victim testified that she was 13 when she began engaging in commercial sex acts for Webster and that she continued to do so for two years. The other minor who was similarly victimized was 17 years old.

The evidence also established that the women were required to give Webster all of the money they earned. When they returned from a “date,” they would receive an “issue,” which was approximately one gram of crack cocaine. In their testimony, the victims described going on up to ten dates per day, every day, with no days off. Victims testified they would work up to five days in a row without sleeping. All of the victims testified that they were addicted to crack cocaine when they were involved with the prostitution business. The women all lived in houses in the Anchorage area that Webster paid for and he imposed rules on them during their residence. They could not have any visitors, nor talk to anyone outside of the “family.” According to testimony, they could not purchase anything without Webster’s knowledge, and had to provide receipts if they did. They also could not talk to men unless they were being paid, and they could not obtain drugs from anyone other than Webster. The women were given an alias to use in connection with the so-called escort services. Victims testified that they called the defendant “Daddy” or “Jerry,” and many of them never knew his real name.

According to witnesses’ trial testimony, Webster would physically assault and abuse the women in various ways. For example, the victims testified that Webster would often assault one woman in front of the others to make an example of her. Victims described being repeatedly choked, punched, slapped, bound and strip-searched by Webster or someone acting at his direction. He also threatened to pour boiling water on one victim while another was in the room. In another incident, when one victim left the house, Webster found her and dragged her back by her hair. In addition, two victims described being locked in “the box,” a small crawl space or closet, as punishment for disrespecting him. Furthermore, several victims described a “family” meeting where Webster dragged one young woman into a room, out of the other victims’ sight. The witnesses said they could hear the sounds of the resulting beating, and described how that woman emerged bruised and bloody, with chunks of her hair missing. One victim also described Webster raping her, and several others testified that Webster insisted on having sex with them.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Audrey Renschen and Kim Sayers-Fay of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Anchorage and Trial Attorney Alexandra Gelber of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The investigation was conducted by the FBI and the Vice Unit of the Anchorage Police Department, in conjunction with the Alaska Human Trafficking Task Force.

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